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WISDOM'S SCHOOL DAYS

By HENRIETTA WYNKOOP LANGE

WOMAN'S BOARD OF FOREIGN MISSIONS
Reformed Church of America
25 East 22d St., New York

MEAL TIME AT BOARDING SCHOOL

WISDOM'S SCHOOLDAYS

Henrietta Wynkoop Lange

"KA, Ka, Ke, Kee, Ko, Ku," we heard shouted above the confused din of many voices as we came through the street of the village of the Black Lake and approached a hut made of mud and roofed with dry brown leaves. The hut was much more airy and open than any of the mud houses in the village, for it was not a home; it was a school, where the Christian teacher gathered some twenty half-naked little children daily and gave them first steps in general education; reading, writing and counting, cleanliness and morals and, above all, lessons in the Bible and elementary Christianity.

"Ka, Ka, Ke, Kee, Ko, Ku," shouted the infants in unison as their teacher pointed with a twig to the letters on the blackboard, the only school apparatus there was except a chair and a table for the teacher. The other children were at the same time noisily reading aloud from some dirty and torn books to show their diligence, for if one stopped his clamour it showed wandering attention and called down reproof or perhaps the twig pointer, on his head.

"Good day, Lazarus," we said as we entered the school.

At once the tumult was hushed and at a word from the teacher all the children said "Salaam" to the visiting missionaries.

"Are these all the children you have in school?" I asked.

"No, Madam, we have thirty on the roll, but two have fever and the others are out in the field with the cattle. These are hard times, and their parents must have the extra money their children can earn to buy food."

"Yes, we know it is hard for them, but you must try to show them how good it is for their children to learn something while they are young. Which of these children are the brightest? And when will these older ones be ready for the third class?"

"She will be ready in June," said Lazarus, pointing to a bright-eyed girl about nine years old, who, it was easy to see, came from a different home from the others, with her hair smoothly combed and braided in a tiny pigtail and her clean little dress.

MADANAPALLE BOARDING SCHOOL

"She, I know, is your daughter Wisdom," I said, and as I spoke her name the little girl looked shyly up at me. "Would you like to come and live in the big Boarding School in Madanapalle, Wisdom?"

"Yes," said Wisdom, little knowing what it would mean for her except that her parents had told her she must study hard to be ready to go to the big school where her mother had been a pupil when a girl.

The following June little Wisdom left her village home and began a new life as one of the ninety boarders in the Madanapalle Girls' Boarding School.

Wisdom found life in the big school rather difficult at first, as there was so much to be done and much to learn. Here was order and cleanliness such as she had never seen even in her own home. Wisdom ate all her meals sitting on the floor, in one of two long rows of girls facing each other. Each had in front of her a single plate which she washed and put on a rack when she had finished eating. She slept on a straw mat spread on the floor, just as she had at home, and her first duty in the morning was to roll up her mat and fold up her sheet and put them in their right places. She had a special task to perform with a group of girls in sweeping with an India broom, a bundle of straws tied together, a schoolroom indoors and a part of the school compound outdoors, and she took turns with the others at carrying from the well all the water to be used for the day for washing and cooking. Once in every two or three weeks, Wisdom spent the whole day in the kitchen with one of the older girls preparing food for all the school, thus learning the housework it is so important for girls to know. Sewing she learned in school hours and practiced in making her own simple clothing which she needed in addition to what the Mission could supply her from the Sewing Guild boxes, the skirts and jackets which the little school girls wear.

School life was not all work, however. There were hours of happy play on the school compound, learning games she had never known in her village life. There were walks out in the country, and on one memorable holiday the Missiamma, teachers, and girls climbed a nearby hill and held a picnic on the top in the shadow of a little Hindu temple. They played games, told stories, ate their luncheon and sang all the songs they knew, and ended with a little prayer for the people living Christless lives in the town that lay below.

Wisdom had struggles of her own. Back in the village of the Black Lake all the children quarrelled, called each other the worst names they could think of and told lies, even though they felt it was not quite right. Wisdom could not stop these old habits all at once, but soon she found that any one who did such things in the Boarding School not only was punished by Missiamma and the teachers and "lost caste" with the other girls, but was not being a Christian. All the school life centered around this thought of what it meant to be a Christian. Every girl as she awoke in the morning began the day with silent prayer, kneeling on her mat: before breakfast all the boarders met for a hymn and prayer: grace was asked before each meal, and the school opened and closed with

SCHOOL DORMITORY

In the school there were simple tasks such as writing texts on picture post cards to be given to Hindu children, mounting Bible pictures on cloth for the Bible women to use in their preaching, and going on Saturday morning with the dands of Christian women to the villages where the school girls' sweet singing of hymns helped to gather a crowd of listeners. In vacation time, too, she gathered Hindu children in her own village and taught them Bible verses and stories about Jesus and many simple Christian hymns.

As she passed from class to class, Wisdom became one of the older girls on whom more responsibility fell. Each of the big girls had a "little sister," or perhaps two, for whom she cared, looking after their clothes, bathing them, washing their hair and helping them with their lessons and in other ways. Wisdom developed great ability to manage the younger ones and she naturally took up various extra duties. She formed the chattering, unruly mass of

prayer. Outside of school hours, there was Sunday School and all the church services, and the Christian Endeavor Society which met for an hour every week.

Wisdom fought with her bad habits, and with Christ's help won the victory. After a few years she was not only seeking to make her own life right with God, but asking what she could do to help others know and love her Lord Jesus.

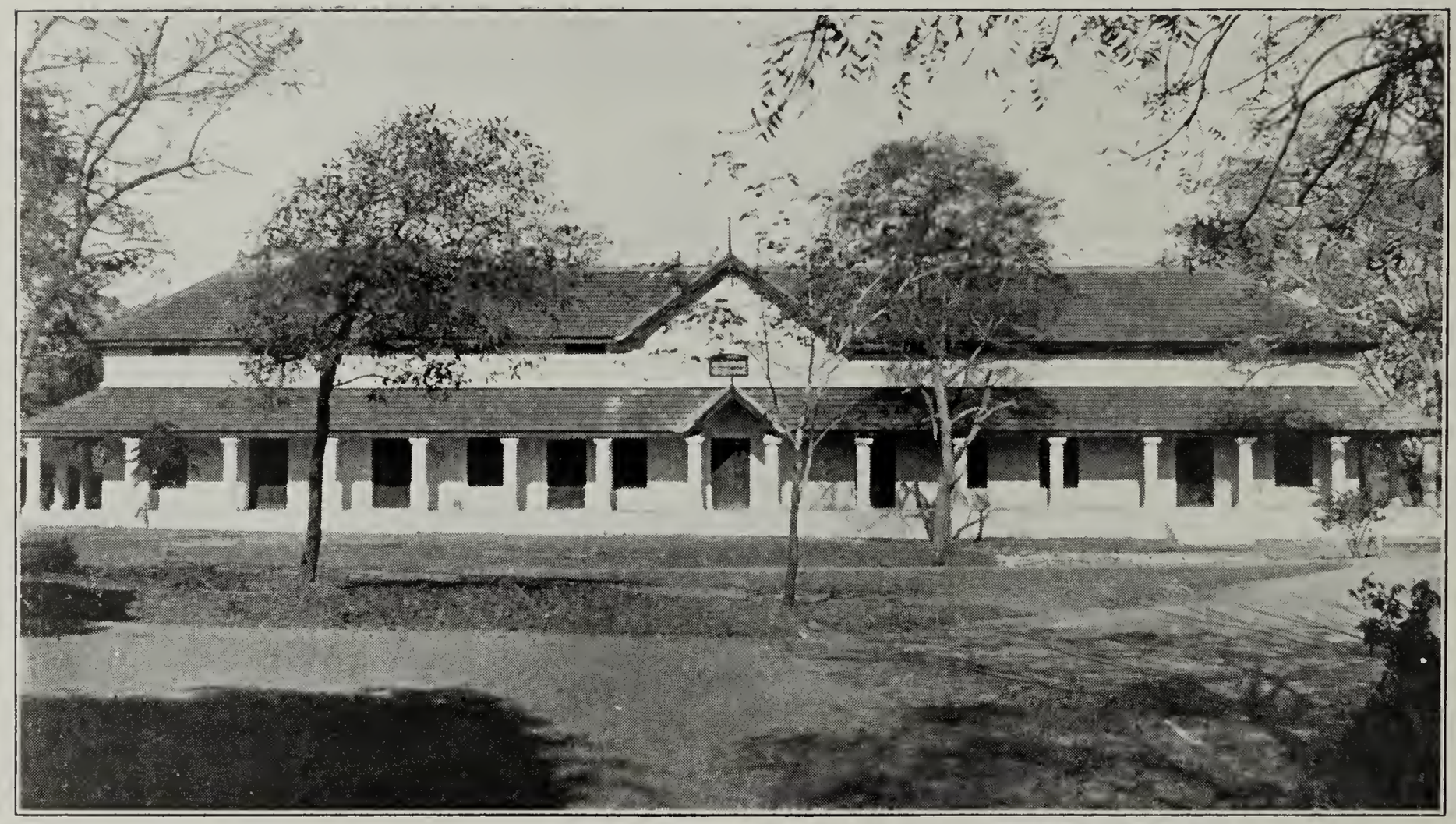
girls into the long caterpillar line for marching to church and other meetings; she arranged the dramatizing of scenes from "Pilgrim's Progress" for the girls to act before Hindu women during the week of the Evangelistic Campaign, and was both stage manager and actress. The Missiamma could be sure that whatever was given to Wisdom to attend to would be promptly and thoroughly carried out.

CLASS IN SEWING

At last came the great moment when Wisdom had reached the highest class in the Boarding School, the Third Form, or Eighth Grade, and her fifth year since she came from her village, and Wisdom stood first in the class. Then one day the Missiamma called her to her office and said she had done so well in her studies and was showing such a good Christian spirit, she might have the Arcot Mission scholarship in the Girls' High School of the United Free Church Mission in Madras.* It did not take her long to decide: indeed, she would do her best to use those three more precious years of study.

Life in the new Boarding School was not so very different from the old, except that here Wisdom was in the best of city schools where the standard of work was higher and she was almost lost in the large classes and was but one among three or four hundred pupils. There was the competition among the

* Since 1917, the Arcot Mission has opened its own Girls' High School in Ranipettai, so Wisdom's successors need not go to another Mission to complete their course. This means that many more girls can receive the benefit of High School training than when only two or three could be selected to hold such expensive scholarships.



BEATTIE MEMORIAL NORMAL TRAINING SCHOOL, CHITTOOR

many bright girls gathered from many Missions, and the pressure of the difficult final examinations in prospect. Wisdom grew thin under the strain, and might have broken down in health, if she had not had the excellent care of the ladies in charge of the school, and extra diet of milk and eggs provided by her own Mission.

After High School, what? That was the question for Wisdom to decide. She wished very much to serve her less fortunate Indian sisters and also to help the Mission which had taken care of her all the way and now asked her to decide what her life work should be. Of course, like every girl in India, she must marry sometime, but Wisdom wanted

first to use her education as freely as possible. What should she choose? There was the Woman's Christian College in Madras with its 95 students and its staff of seven British and American women, ready to take her through four years more of intensive study, with the dazzling prospect of winning a B. A. degree in the end. Wisdom had visited the college buildings in Madras in their fine ten-acre garden and, moreover, she knew several of the students who had gone from her own High School and were full of praise of their college.

"It is very different from High School," they said. "Here we sleep on iron beds, and each dormitory holds at most six or seven girls instead of all the girls sleeping together in one large room, and some girls have small rooms with only one roommate. Then we eat in the dining-room with the Professors. It did seem queer at first to eat at tables, but we use our fingers still instead of spoons or forks, and so we manage very well. Every night four of us are invited to sit at the Professors' table, and a Professor sits at each of our tables, so we talk and have good times at our meals instead of eating silently; as we used to do. Our chapel is a pretty airy room, and most of us think that our chapel prayers are the nicest parts of the day. Then each class has its own study room and we have a 'common room' where we can all gather and talk and play and do as we like, besides a fine big library containing a couple of thousand books. Each Professor gives us individual attention and our college is having unusual success in the University examinations, so that even Hindu girls are coming to secure the advantage of such good teaching and enjoy our college life. We have all kinds of societies; literary, debating, musical, athletic, dramatic, and the Y. W. C. A., as well as our own paper, 'The Sunflower,' which we publish twice a year. Oh, Wisdom, you certainly ought to come here after High School."

And Wisdom felt she would, indeed, like to be one of these favored college students, and help carry out the motto of the college, "Lighted to lighten" in her own life, as the ten graduates and others who had been in the college were trying to do, some of them as Headmistresses and teachers in Mission Girls' schools, some studying to be fully qualified doctors, and others married and making homes centers of light and Christian influence.

But there was also another possibility. Wisdom could go to the new School of Medicine for Women which had just opened in Vellore in connection with the Mary Taber Schell Hospital. She

longed to be one of those pioneer medical women who would have such wonderful opportunity to help their sisters, but she thought, too, of closer calls for her help. Her father had died while she was still in High School, and her mother was struggling to support her little flock of young children. It was hard to decide but Wisdom had prayed over it and felt she was right when she put aside for the present the more enticing visions of the colleges, and determined to take a one year's normal training to become a teacher at once in the Madanapalle Boarding School, where she had first had her eyes opened to the great world about her and its needs. In this way she could earn money to clothe and educate her younger sisters, and perhaps in a few years, when the older ones could also earn something, she could fulfill her dream of going to one of the colleges.

So Wisdom's school days are not yet ended, but the rest of her story must be lived before it can be written. In following her career, we have traced the life history of hundreds of girls like her who are in the Mission schools in India. The school in the village of the Black Lake is one of thousands of such village schools. It is in these that the system of Christian education followed by all the Missions in South India begins a broad basis of the mighty pyramid which rises through station Boarding Schools to High Schools and culminates in an apex of Colleges for men and women. Every step of Wisdom's upward path was dependent on the Mission, which supplies every link in the chain of our Christian Girls' education in India. And behind the Mission stand those friends in America who love Christ's "other sheep" in India and heed His call to "feed my lambs." Are YOU one of these?

WOMAN'S CHRISTIAN COLLEGE, MADRAS